

“RETURN, RETURN, O SHULAMITE! RETURN, RETURN!”

NO. 1794

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD’S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 10, 1884,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon you.
What will you see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies.”
Solomon’s Song 6:13.*

THE translation into the word “Shulamite” is unhappy, it is unmusical, and misses the meaning. The Hebrew word is a feminine of “Solomon.” “Solomon” may stand for the bridegroom’s name, and then the well-beloved bride takes her husband’s name in a feminine form of it, which is Shulamith, Salome, or perhaps better “Solyma.” The King has named his name upon her, and as Caius has his Caiia, so Solomon has his Solyma. He is the Prince of Peace, and she is the Daughter of Peace. Earlier she was called “the fairest among women,” but now she is espoused unto her Lord, and has a fullness of peace. Therefore she is called the Peace-laden, or the Peace-crowned. You know how truly it is so with the justified in Christ Jesus. Because the sound is sweeter, and the sense is clearer, permit me to read the text thus—“Return, return, O Solyma: return, return, that we may look upon you. What will you see in Solyma? As it were the company of two armies.” May the Holy Spirit, like a dove, rest upon us while we linger amid the verses of this Song of Loves.

A soul redeemed by blood, and brought by the Holy Spirit into a loving, living, lasting union with the Well-Beloved, cannot remain unnoticed. Solomon is known all over the world, Solomon is sought after for his wisdom, and therefore Solyma will shine with something of his brightness, and she will be inquired after too. In the Church of God no man lives unto himself, or travels through the world unwatched. If you are interested in Christ, heaven and earth and hell will be interested in you. Some men are but as a chip in the porridge, they have no savor in themselves, and none comes from them, but the believing man, the Christ-communing man, is full of influences both repellent and attractive, and he may be sure that where he goes he will be known and read. As the house of Israel is among the nations like a burning torch in dry stubble, so also is the spiritual Israel. Voices will cry after the bride of Christ, “Return! Return! Return! Return!” A pilgrim bound for the Celestial City cannot go through the world, even through the worst part of it, such as Vanity Fair, without being noticed, and questioned, and sought after, and if possible ensnared. Do not think, you who have been made a living man by the quickening of the Holy Spirit that you can but glide through this world as the spiritually dead can do, for they may be quietly borne along to the place of corruption, the life within you is too strange, too operative to be overlooked. You are a wonder to many, and you may well be so, for God has worked great marvels in you and for you. Beloved, you are the Lord’s witnesses, and witnesses must not sulk away in the background or remain mute. When they bear their honest witness it is in open court, where they will be heard and regarded by all who are concerned in the suit, whether *pro* or *con*. Oh, saints of God, you are never unobserved, you are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, and none of these witnesses are indifferent to you, they all watch you with steady gaze to see how you run your race. The good are intent that you should so run as to obtain, and there are evil ones who long for your defeat. Solyma is addressed by urgent voices, who plead with her to return to them. For good or evil, multitudes of tongues cry to her, “Return, return, O Solyma, return, return.”

Will you kindly notice from the connection of my text what state Solyma was in when these calls came to her? She was in her glory and beauty. In admiration the question is asked, “Who is she that looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?” A church or an individual Christian in a low state of grace may escape observation. Who cares about a

dead church? Who fights with a lukewarm people? But if Jesus Christ is in the church, or in the heart, He will soon be seen. The evangelist tells us, “He could not be hid.” You may slip down the street in the night without a candle, and like a thief you may pass by unobserved, but if the Lord has lighted your candle, and you carry it with you, the watchmen will notice you, the dogs will bark at you, and others will spy you out. As fire reveals itself, so also grace will. A bundle of lavender proclaims its own whereabouts by its fragrance, and so does the life of God in the soul. You may be sure that if the Lord of hosts is with you and in you, you will assuredly awaken the animosity of some and the admiration of others. I pray that you and I may be in a bright, clear, forcible condition, as the bride was in this part of the Cantic, then shall we be sought after, and inquired about.

It appears that the church in her beauty had gone down to attend to her work. “I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded.” She did not sit down in the house to admire herself, nor go into the street to show herself, she went down into her Lord’s garden to attend to her proper work, and then it was that they cried, “Return, return.” Neither the world nor Christ Himself will call much after us if we go forth to make displays of our own excellences. “Come, see my zeal for the Lord of hosts,” is a wretched piece of self-consciousness, which disgusts more than it attracts. A diligent life is an attractive life. Do you, like an ant, work in your season, carrying your due burden upon the anthill, and if you do this for love of Jesus you do nobly. Plod on without courting approval, and rest content to do your utmost for the common welfare. In fellowship with your Lord humbly do your day’s work in your day. Seek not great things for yourself. Ask not to rule in the court, but be willing to work in the field, seek not to recline on the couch, but take your pruning knife, and go forth among the vines, to fulfill your office, and in that self-forgetting service your beauty shall be manifested, and voices shall salute you, crying, “Return, return.”

It appears, too, that while she was thus engaged, she was the subject of a great stir and emotion of heart. Perhaps she had felt dull and dreary till she entered into her work, but while she was busy with her pomegranates and her nuts, she cries, “Before I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.” She felt that she could hasten like the chariots of a willing people, who rush to the fight from love of their prince. She felt as if she could run after her Beloved, she could leap, she could fly. Like a chariot that is drawn by Pharaoh’s swiftest steeds, her spirit left all behind. Thus vigorous and active, she was watched by many eyes, and soon she heard voices coming from the four quarters of the universe, crying, “Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return.” I would, dear friends that all Christians were what they should be. I am told, but I would not judge, that large numbers of professing people are only half alive, and are altogether asleep. If it is so, I wonder not that they are so inconsiderable in their influence. If they are neither diligent in their Master’s business, nor fervent in spirit towards Him, they are justly despised by those about them. If it is so with you, my brethren, you are losing the joy of Christian life when you might be filled with delight, you are poverty-stricken, where you might be rich; you are as beggars in the city where you are entitled to take up an honorable citizenship. May the Lord revive you! May He forgive your coldness, and set your souls on fire with love to Jesus! If you have life, may you now have it more abundantly! Does not your Master desire that the feeblest of you may be as David, and David as the angel of the Lord?

I speak to you who are the beloved of the Lord, to you who labor in holy service, who are quickened with a high degree of spiritual life, and feel your souls within you stirred with sacred enthusiasm. You are worth addressing, may the Holy Spirit make my address worthy of your attention! Let us use our text in two ways, may each one be profitable!

First, *she hears the lower voices that cry, “Return, return, O Solyma; Return, return,”* and she answers them with most conclusive negatives. Read the text another way, and in the second place, *she hears voices from above, which cry, “Return, return, O Solyma: Return, return,”* and she answers them by her actions as well as by her words.

I. Let us listen for a minute or two, but only with our ears, not with our hearts, to THE LOWER VOICES. *Where do these voices come from?* There are voices from the vast deep of sin and hell, voices from the tombs which we have left, voices from the Egypt from which we have fled. They are always crying, like unquiet ghosts, “Return, return.” Especially they do call to young souls, who are newly wedded to Jesus, in the hope that they have not as yet forgotten their own kindred and their father’s

house. When we have gone a long way in the divine life, the world feels dubious of our return, and almost gives us up, preferring rather to accuse than to invite. After many years of faithful service, and of resolute nonconformity to the world, many temptations which assaulted our youth are unknown to our maturity. The devil is not altogether a fool, although he is great in that direction, and therefore he does not continue forever to use nets which have failed to entangle the birds. If he finds that flattery will not ensnare us, he leaves his old tactics and tries other methods. When “Return, return” will not woo us, he puts on his lion form, and roars till the mountains shake. Upon young believers he very commonly uses very powerful inducements to go back. In the hope that he is dealing with Mr. Pliable, he exhibits the difficulty of godliness and the pleasantness of sin, and draws the moral that they had better retrace their steps. To them he calls as sweetly as his cruel voice can tone itself, “Return, return, O Shulamite: return, return.”

By *old companions* he does this. They say, “You have left us all, we do not know why. You have turned into a fanatic, you have joined with gloomy Christian people, and you are not half the good fellow you used to be. Are you not getting a little tired of those dreary ways? Are not the rules of Christ too precise and Puritanical? Are not the ways of God too self-denying? Is not godliness too holy and too heavenly for poor fallible beings like ourselves? If so, the door is open, we will welcome you back. It is true you tore yourself away and said that you must go on pilgrimage to the Celestial City, but we will not throw this in your teeth if you will give up such nonsense. Come, be a good fellow with us once more. We have not drunk up all the wine, nor broken all the viols. We are care-for-nothings still, and we shall be glad to make you as light-hearted as ourselves. You were a jolly fellow before you took those blues, and turned so squeamish, come, shake it off, and be yourself again.” How winningly they put it! How cleverly they mimic the tones of true friendship! One would think they sought our good, and were anxious to be our guardian angels.

Sometimes the desires of nature come to their help, and the tender passion is enlisted on the side of evil. Bright eyes and gentle lips speak to the natural heart, and plead with it to return. The tender love of women has thus played the tempter, and so has the strong affection of men. Courtesy and amiability cry, “Why do you fight so shy of us? You know what happy times we used to have together. Come, you have tried these Christian people and their faith, you must have found it very moping and melancholy, return and be merry once more. See how much more free we are than they, do not live by rule and order, return to the liberty of sin.” Thus do her former comrades cry, “Return, return, O Solyma.”

The *old joys* sometimes, in moments of weakness which will come upon us, revive the memory, and attempt to mislead us. I have known the young Christian remember what he once thought were joys, and though he has clean left them, and hates them, yet in the distance which lends enchantment he does not notice so much of their shallowness, baseness, and brevity, and he thinks to himself, “In those days I laughed away the hours right merrily; life was light as a feather; in its froth and foam I saw rainbows of delight. Shall I try these things again? Was I not too hasty in renouncing them?” All the while the voices cry enchantingly, like the songs of the Sirens, “Return, return, O Solyma; return, return.” They bring out their most melodious music, and omit all discordant passages from the sonnet of life. They would have us hark back to what was once our joy. Oh, brothers and sisters, ‘tis a wretched temptation, and yet some fall before it.

Do you not know how the world will even call us back to our *old cares*? We used to fret and worry until by God’s grace we were led to try walking by faith, and then the Lord helped us to rest in His love, and wait patiently for Him, and now perhaps for years we have had no burdens, for we have cast them on the Lord. We have gone in the morning, and told Him the fears of the day, and at night we have had little else to do but to bless Him for the mercy which has averted all those fears. We have lived in sweet content, rich in joyful expectation, and not poor even in present happiness, and now perhaps the world says, “You have spent too much of your money on religion; why did you not save it? You wasted a mint of your time upon furthering a kingdom which is imaginary. Oh, if you had given up those energies to the world, and stuck to your business, how much richer you might have been! Come now, quit those dreams, shun those prayer meetings, leave that tiresome office in the Sunday school, give up philanthropic speculations, and follow after your personal interests, like a sensible man, you may get on then, if you mind the main chance you may rise in the social scale.” There are times when steady, sober peo-

ple, for whom the temptations of gaiety and vice have no charm at all, stand spellbound by these more solid but equally degrading offers. Madame Bubble, as you know, offered to the pilgrim her person, and there are many who turn with loathing from so vile an offer, but then she also offered her purse, and there are men like Mr. Standfast, who are as poor as an owlet, to whom that offer comes with dangerous force. Her voice has a shrill metallic ring, as she cries, “Return, return, O Solyma; return, return. Return from generosity to selfishness, from holy zeal to worldliness and prudence. Seek that which all the nations of the world seek after, that which you can see with yours eyes, and enjoy with your mouth.” Many are these calls, I need not go into details, you will hear them soon enough. The Sirens are a numerous and ensnaring sisterhood.

When do these voices come? Their sound is heard full often. “Return, return, return, return”—four times over the text has it. They come so often that the word in the epistle to the Hebrews is more than justified, “And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from where they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.” These opportunities are in our way everywhere, and at all times. If you wish to leave off being a Christian, if you wish to follow the world in its pleasures or in its labors, the doors are always open. It is a wonderfully forgiving world if you will but quit your protest against it. If we run away from our old master, and wish to return to his service, his yoke is always ready for our neck, he will never deny us employment, even though it is to feed swine. Only too glad is the devil to pardon runaways. He is not ashamed to return with seven others to the house which he before left. Often, often the child of God in his early days hears the entreaties of destroyers, as with all subtlety they plead, “Return, return, O Bride of Solomon; return, return.”

At times these voices come from quarters to which our hearts lie open. Many a man has been wooed from the ways of holiness by her that lay in his bosom. Samson had his Delilah. More often still, the professing Christian woman has been solicited to forsake her Lord by him who should have helped her in her noblest aspirations. Children have been misled by parents, friends by friends, for Satan has many slaves, and many who do his bidding almost unwittingly. It is a fight to reach heaven, and few there be to help us in it, but the path to hell is downward, and multitudes thrust out their hands to urge us to the infernal deeps. These cries are borne to us by every gale, in tones both loud and gentle, “Return, return.”

And dear brethren, we shall find that they solicit us in our best moments. I cannot fully account for the fact, but so it is, that I am most liable to speak unadvisedly with my lips when I have just enjoyed the raptures of high fellowship with God. Yonder shines the Mountain of Transfiguration in its unrivalled splendor, but lo, at the very foot of it the devil rages in the lunatic child! Our highest graces are not to be trusted, for, as the most venomous serpents lurk among the brightest flowers, so are temptations most abundant by our most spiritual and heavenly joys. Trust not yourself, O child of God, when you have seen the invisible, when you have stood within the circle of fire, and spoken with God as only His favorites may! Think not yourself secure when you come down into your worldly business, though you have bathed your forehead in the serene light of communion. As pirates distinctly aim to attack the most heavily-laden galleons, so will Satan assail you when your vessel has just left the Gold Coast of meditation and prayer. Therefore, watch, and pray always. That detestable voice, which dared to ask the Master Himself to fall down and worship Satan, will come to you when you are most bright and shining with the glory of hallowed fellowship, and it will whisper to you, “Return, return. Come down from the mountain, and break the commandments to splinters at its foot.” The fiend will call you Solyma, quoting your heavenly name—that name of peace and love—and yet he will dare to say, “Return, return.” He will flatter us for our virtues, and yet tempt us to the worst of vices. Get you behind me, Satan. Depart, foul fiend! Even when repulsed he will return to the charge, crouch at our feet, and whine out still, “Return, return.” The treasures of Egypt, and the pleasures of sin, are his bait and bribe. We cannot and will not return at his bidding, yet his frequent solicitation puts us to a standstill, and makes us cry for help.

Notice that our text goes on to say *why they wish us to return*, “Return, return, that we may look upon you.” And is that all? Am I to be a traitor to my Lord and leave His holy ways, and forfeit heaven, to be made a show of by you, O Satan, or by you, O world? Is this a full reward for treachery—“that we may look upon you?” Why, their looks are daggers. As the eyes of dragons are the eyes of the ungodly world, as malignant stars that blast the soul. Whenever you long for ungodly men to see your piety, your piety will wither beneath their glance. Remember how that expression of looking upon Zion is some-

times used in Scripture? In Micah 4:11 we have it—“Now also many nations are gathered against you, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion.” They wished to spy out her sorrows and weaknesses, that they might jest at her, and grieve her, these enemies will do the same with you if you give them the opportunity. Trust a wolf at your throat sooner than worldly men in religious matters. They cannot mean you good, nor do you good should they mean it. They will draw you out and then expose you; they will entice you into sin and then report your faults. When the world loves the holy man it is the love of the vulture for the sick lamb. Fear the worldling, even when he bears you gifts.

Now hear *Solyma's wise answer to her tempters*. She says, “What will you see in Solyma?” Do you ask me, O world, to come back and show myself to be your friend? Do you promise me approval? Do you vow to look upon me, admire me, and take me for an example? What is there in me that you can approve of? What will you see in Solyma? What can the world see in a believer? The world knows us not, because it knew not Christ. A blind man wants to see me, I need not go far to oblige him, for he will get but little out of it if I yield to his request. What a vain reason—“That we may look upon you”! They are so blind they cannot even see themselves, nor know that they are blind. What have you and I to do with them? No, let us walk in the light, and have fellowship with God, and then our life shall be hid with Christ in God, only to be manifested when our Lord is manifested, and we shall be well content to have it so. Listen, O blind world, while we tell you what you would see if we did come to you. “What will you see in Solyma?” You would see—we grieve to say it—a conflict within us, “As it were the company of two armies.” You would see two things in us, and yet neither would give you satisfaction. There is sin in us, but inasmuch as it grieves us to have it there we will not show it you. We do not wish to make mirth for the daughter of Babylon, and when her children ask us to make music for them by singing one of the songs of Zion, we answer, “How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?” If we must tell you what you would see in us, we will confess our faultiness, but warn you that out of this you would get but little joy. You would see two armies, it is true, but neither of them would yield to you. You would see in us a nature like your own, but it is mortified, kept under, and laid under condemnation. It would give you no great pleasure to see it, for we reckon it to be dead. The dead are poor company. There is in us, it is true, a capacity for all your worldly joys, but the world is crucified to us, and we are crucified unto the world. There is in us a capacity for all your merriment, but if we were forced to be with you we should be dreadful killjoys to you, you would wonder why we did not laugh when you laugh at sin, and that we would not be as ready as you are to run into excess of riot. We would soon weary you, for the Lord has said, “I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people.” You would say by and by, “Leave these slow souls be gone, they hinder our mirth.” If we came among you as we are, it would happen with us before long as it did with Israel, for “Egypt was glad when they departed.” Our nature that is like your nature is put under restraint, and dies daily, and its expiring groans would be sorry music in your ears.

Then, do you know we have another army in us? That is, there is a new life in us, that life is the indwelling Spirit of God, as it is written, “I will dwell in them, and walk in them.” If we did return at your request, if we came in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ, with the Holy Spirit indwelling our bodies, and making them His temples, you would not know what to make of us, and consequently you would scoff at us, as Ishmael did at Isaac, or envy us as his brethren envied Joseph. You would be sure to ridicule us, for you would not understand us, and therefore you would count us hypocrites and sanctimonious fools. Oxen might as well commune with men as the wicked with the godly. We have a life beyond you and above you, into which you cannot enter. We are sorry for you that you will not receive the heavenly life which is in Christ Jesus, but as you have it not, we cannot make you our confidants or associates. You would grieve us, and we would provoke you, and therefore we are best apart. You say, “Return, return, O Solyma; return, return, that we may look upon you,” and our only answer must be, “What would you see in Solyma?” nothing but that which would rebuke and anger you, you would see a company of two armies, both fighting against you.

Come, young brothers and sisters, you that have been tempted to go back, you cannot even tolerate the thought. You have burned your boats behind you, and must conquer or die. Like one of old, you say, “I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.” To go back were to call the word of God a lie, to make God Himself false, to tell the worldling that there are, after all, no pleasures in Christ

like the pleasures of the world, it would be to spit in your Savior’s face, to play the Judas, to sell Christ for pieces of money, or for the filthy lusts of this present evil world. Go back! It is to renounce heaven and all its glories, it is to choose a terrible deathbed, with a guilty conscience ringing the knell of your soul, it is to choose eternal banishment from the presence of God, and from the glory of His power. You cannot return; you cannot even look back. If you are a true Shulamite, you will not even deliberate for a moment about it, but flinging yourself into the Beloved’s arms, you will cry, “Lord, to whom should I go? You have the words of eternal life.” God help you to do so, for Jesus’ sake. That is the first part of our subject.

II. Now we turn to listen, not with our ears only, but with our hearts too, to the call of THE HIGHER VOICES which cry, “Return, return.” Brethren, to go to heaven, to go to Christ, to go towards holiness, is a return to God’s people, for God’s people, are originally His children. Though they are prodigals, and have gone into a far country, they always were His children, even when they spent their substance in riotous living they were still His sons, and each of them could speak of “My Father’s house.” To come to Christ, and holiness, and heaven, is to return. Besides, all God’s people have a new life put into them. Where did that new life come from but from heaven and God? Therefore to go towards God is for the quickened ones to return. All God’s people are bound for heaven, it is in their charter party that they should sail for heaven, and therefore to heaven they must go. When the Israelites came out of Egypt to go to Canaan they were not going to a strange land, they were returning to what had always been their inheritance according to the covenant, they were going out of the house of bondage, and they were returning to the land that flowed with milk and honey, where their fathers had sojourned before them. Now, today, as a child of God, I can hear voices out of the yet beyond, ringing out of glory, and crying to me, “Return, return.” My Father is in heaven, my Savior is on the throne, many brethren have gone before, all my heart is with my treasure, therefore I hear the shining ones crying to me every day, “Return, return, O Solyma; return, return!” Every harp in the heavenly choir is ringing out an invitation to all the Lord’s beloved, every palm-bearing hand is beckoning to us, every glorified lip is calling us to come up higher.

To return, I think means this—come nearer to Christ, nearer to God, nearer to holiness. You are saved; seek to be like your Savior. You did enjoy splendid days at first, in the love of your espousals; return to them, walk always in the light as God is in the light. You were once in the banqueting house, and the banner over you was love, return to that house of fellowship. Every day seek to lose yourself more in Christ, to live more completely in Him, by Him, for Him, with Him. Return, return, to greater heights of holiness, to deeper self-denial, to braver service, to more intense love, to more burning zeal, to more of the God-like and the Christ-like. Return, return, the holiest and the best call us that way. Every saint in heaven cries, “Return”; every child of God on earth who is full of the inner life entreats us to return, and chiefly, that dear voice, which once, for us cried, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” is always calling to us, “Return, return.” Oh, how sweetly does He use the name He Himself gave us, our marriage name! Hear Him beseech us, “O Solyma, My best beloved, return, return, and come to Me!” These are the higher voices.

Notice that in the text that word “return” is put four times over. Is it not because it is of the highest importance that every child of God should keep returning, and coming nearer to the Father’s house? Is it not because it is our highest joy, our strongest security, our best enrichment, to be always coming to Christ as unto a living stone, and getting into closer fellowship with Him? As He calls four times, is it not a hint that we are slow to come? We ought to come to Jesus not only at His first call, but even at the glance of His eyes, when He looks as though He longed for our love, it ought to be our rapture to think only of Him, and live wholly to Him, but as we fail to answer to first pleas, He cries four times, “Return, return, O Solyma; return, return. Come to your Husband, your own loving Lord.” He ceases not to entreat until we do return. Do not the reduplications of this call hint at His strong desire after us, His condescending love for us? It does seem so wonderful to me that Christ should want our fellowship, but He does, He cannot be happy without us. Still He sits down upon the well when He is thirsty, and looking across to Samaria’s fallen daughter He says to her, “Give Me to drink.” His people are His fullness, He cannot be filled if they are away, I dared not have said this if the Holy Spirit had not declared it, but it is true. Without His people Jesus would be a Head without a body and that is a ghastly object, a King

without subjects, and that would have been a wretched parody of royalty, a Shepherd without sheep, and that would have been a sorrowful office, having many pains but no reward. Jesus must have us, or He is a Bridegroom without a bride, bereaved and barren. Oh, how He loves us! How He longs for communion with us! Shall He stand and cry, “Return, return,” and will we not come to Him at once? Hear Him again in another way. He knocks at our door and He cries, “Open to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My undefiled, for My head is filled with dew, and My locks with the drops of the night.” Will we not admit Him? If He seeks our company, and therefore calls us to return, our spirit bursts her fetters; she is ashamed of the bonds that hold her on the right and on the left. She cries, “Let me go, I must be with my Lord, His voice compels me. My soul would leap out of my body rather than not come to Him who cries, ‘Return, return, return, return.’”

I have shown you why the call is so often repeated. Do you not think it is a very instructive call? Permit me to put it thus, “Return,” that is, to your first simple faith. If you have risen to greatness of conceit and pride of knowledge, return to your humble thoughts. Shrink to nothing again in the presence of your God. Come to the cross as you came at first, saying—

*“I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me.”*

Return to your first loving communion with Christ, for then the days were only bright with His presence, and the night watches were not weary while you could commune with Him. Return to the happy love of yours espousals, when you went after Him into the wilderness, for those were idyllic days. Return, return, to your first ardor in service. Nothing was too hot or too heavy for you then, you were passionate to be engaged in seeking His redeemed. You have grown lazy now, and you think service for God too severe a strain upon you. Return to your first diligence in joyous service. Return also to your eagerness for holy growth. Then you desired to have the best that God could give you, in those days you resolved to be a thorough Christian, not, barely to live, but to live unto God in the highest degree. Return to that, and aspire after more. If you have left the best form of consecration, return to it. Oh, sea, rise once more to high-water mark, if you have turned to ebb! Oh, soul, come back to the highest you have ever attained or longed for! As the eagle cries, “higher”; as the river cries, “fuller”; as the day cries, “brighter”; so let it be with you. You are married to Him whose blood has bought you, and He cannot, will not be in heaven without you, therefore, hasten to obey while He says to you, “Return, return!”

I beg you to observe what the spouse has to say to this when she is thus called upon to return to the Lord. The Lord says to her, “Return, return, that we may look upon you.” Is not that a reason for coming back? The Lord says, “That I may look upon you.” He desires your company, and seems gently to hint that you have kept aloof from Him. He seems to say—“You have not been much with Me alone lately, you have neglected the reading of the word, and the hearing of it, I have scarcely seen your face, therefore return, that I may look upon you.” Cover your face and say, “Lord, why should You look on me? I am full of sin.” But then draw near to Him, that His look of love may bring you to repentance, and cause your sin to pass away. Remember He has power in His eyes to look you into purity and beauty. Come and say, “Look upon me, Lord, search me, try me, and know my ways.” Return, that with infinite pity your Beloved may see what ails you, and then with His dear pierced hand may perform a divine surgery upon you, and make you well again.

“Return, that we may look upon you.” I think I may use the phrase to express also that intense satisfaction which Jesus has in every believer. With what pleasure the mother looks upon her child, she remembers no more the travail for joy that a man is born into the world, but with infinitely greater satisfaction does Christ see of the travail of His soul in every believer. You ought to show yourselves to Jesus, you have cost Him so much, He has loved you even to the death, and loves you still; you ought to abide with Him. Return to Him that He may look upon you.

And I think, too, when we live near to Him, and get into fellowship with Him, Jesus feels a sweet complacency towards us. O dear parents, you know the pleasure you have in your loving children, if they have been away from you for years, what a satisfaction it is to see them within your doors, there is no sight like it! Your Lord loves you so much that it gives Him profound pleasure; it swells His heaven to the brim to see you living in His love. What must be His grief when you go fussing about the world, and have no time to talk with Him, when you go out sporting and mixing with His enemies, and say that

you have no leisure to commune with Him! You give delight to Him who is Immanuel, God with us, when you frequently approach Him, or constantly abide with Him. You make Him glad with your secret devotion, your heart’s affection, your holy boldness, your all-absorbing zeal. Oh, do come to your Lord that He may look upon you!

Did I hear you bashfully say, “What will you see in Solyma? If Jesus looks on such a dead dog as I am, what will He see in me? I am so full of evil.” He will see in you that which delights Him. He will see His own work there, yes, He will see Himself there. Did you ever see the sun reflected in a little splinter of glass? The mirror was scarcely an inch in diameter, yet you saw the heavens in it. Have you ever looked upon a bubble blown by a schoolboy’s pipe, and seen a thousand rainbows in it? When the Lord looks on His people, He sees the reflection of Himself, He can see Himself in our eyes, and therefore those eyes charm Him so that He cries, “You have ravished My heart, My sister, My spouse, you have ravished My heart with one of yours eyes, with one chain of your neck.” The infinite love there is between Christ and us makes Him see no sin in Jacob, neither iniquity in Israel, but He looks until He exclaims, “You are all fair, My love, there is no spot in you.” Be not ashamed to return to your Lord, for He lovingly urges you to do so. Let your heart and your flesh, like two armies, welcome Him, let all your inward conflict aim at coming nearer to Him. Rest not till, like Jacob’s two bands, you are altogether under the blessing of the covenant angel.

I will turn my text about a little, and give you another rendering, which will suit the heart which is welcoming its Lord. Our Mahanaim, our meeting of hosts, shall not be for war, now that the Lord invites us like Jacob to return to the land of milk and honey, but the companies shall be as musical as they are martial. There are within our experiences companies of singing soldiers, choirs of camps. The text exhibits the warring soul, triumphant in her Lord, and meeting Him with timbrel and harp—

*“Spouse of Christ, in arms contending,
Though your battle-course must run;
Yet with prayers for help ascending,
Shout your praise for triumphs won.”*

Oh, if my Lord will come and meet me, He shall see in me whole choirs of songsters! My heart, like Miriam, shall take a timbrel, and all my powers, like the daughters of Israel, shall follow, dancing and singing with glad accord. On the high-sounding cymbals my heart shall play, singing—“His own right hand and His holy arm have gotten Him the victory. Glory! Glory! Where He comes glory dwells.” When shall I come into His presence, and behold my God, my exceeding joy? Then will I praise Him with body and soul, with heart and with voice. His coming with all His perfections, and my coming with all my desires, shall make a Mahanaim, and the two hosts, once met, shall encamp together, guarding the King’s pavilion, which glitters in the midst. Then shall the warriors become minstrels, and the soldiers shall be singers, as in the valley of Berachah, where all the people triumphed, and they returned to Jerusalem playing upon harps, and psalteries, and trumpets.

Here I leave you in the joyful presence of the King. We cannot cease speaking at a higher point. The Lord keep us in His presence, for His love’s sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 21.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—917, 779, 853.**

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